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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASMARA 000994

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LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS
DEPT FOR AF/E, CA/VO, CA/EX, AND DS/OFM

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KREC](#) [CVIS](#) [ER](#)

SUBJECT: MFA PROTESTS HARSH RECIPROCAL MEASURES AND U.S.
"DEFAMATION CAMPAIGN"

REF: A. ASMARA 708 (NOTAL)

[1](#)B. ASMARA 963 (NOTAL)

Classified By: AMB Scott H. DeLisi, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Director General for the Americas and International Affairs Girma Asmerom called in the Ambassador on November 24 to lodge two official protests. The first complaint concerned the recent notification to the Eritrean Embassy in Washington extending travel restrictions to all official visitors from the Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE) in addition to its permanently assigned personnel. Girma also protested the USG's public "defamation campaign" about Eritrea's actions in Somalia. In both cases, his message was that Eritrea has been unfairly singled out by the USG for harsh and inconsistent treatment. The Ambassador noted that our actions in Washington merely match exactly what the GSE does to official Americans in Eritrea and, in regard to Somalia, the Ambassador let Girma know that so long as Eritrea continues to send weapons and/or fighters into Somalia, the USG will continue to speak out. That the GSE felt strongly enough to lodge protests on these issues suggests that our actions and messages may be resonating. Interestingly, Girma did not raise the issue of the Embassy's November 20 notification that NIV operations would be temporarily suspended on December 4 due to post's inability to get a visa for a TDY consular officer to cover the section. The Ambassador also used the opportunity to ask for a response to post's request for consular access to a detained Eritrean-American dual national. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) On November 24, Ambassador met with Director General Girma Asmerom at the MFA's request. Girma began the meeting by noting that the GSE wanted to make two formal protests, "strongly and clearly." First, Girma referenced the November 14 diplomatic note sent to the Eritrean Embassy in Washington by the Department noting that travel restrictions would apply not only to permanently assigned Eritrean diplomats but also to official GSE visitors to their bilateral missions in the U.S. Girma said that the GSE viewed the U.S. policy as "harsh and selective" against Eritrea. He commented that the GSE's travel restrictions in Eritrea were not directed at the U.S. in particular, but applied to the entire international community, and had been issued as a result of national

security considerations. The U.S. was too sensitive about the travel restrictions, he asserted, and they should not be an issue for reciprocity. Girma noted that Ethiopia and Pakistan both have policies that require foreign diplomats to apply in advance for permission to travel from their city of assignments. Yet, neither have been subject to reciprocal treatment in the U.S.

¶3. (C) Girma's second message was to protest the "defamation campaign" against Eritrea regarding its position on Somalia. He criticized the U.S. Ambassador to Kenya's November 18 press statement, which categorized Eritrea as a "destabilizing" element in Somalia. Girma said that such comments were "outside of Ambassador Ranneberger's mandate" and unwarranted. Girma also complained about the November 15 statement of Department Spokesman Gonzalo Gallegos which singled out only Eritrea by name as negatively engaged in Somalia. Girma reiterated the GSE's public position that the Eritreans have no agenda in Somalia and that the claims that Eritrea was using Somalia as a proxy battleground against Ethiopia were unfounded. He added that Eritrea has 40 years of ties with Somalia and the GSE's end goal is a democratic and prosperous Somalia. He asserted that accusations against the GSE had been generated by Somali elements supported by Ethiopia. He concluded by noting that the GSE can play a productive role in Somalia and the U.S. should be able to engage his government to this end. (Comment: This was clearly a throw-away remark since the GSE has been pursuing a steadfast course of isolating itself from engagement with the U.S. and Western entities. End Comment.)

¶4. (U) Ambassador said he would convey both messages to the Department. In response to the charges of unfair reciprocal

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treatment, the Ambassador noted that the U.S. was aware that the restrictions applied across the board to all foreigners) and inappropriately so, as the GSE was in violation of the Vienna Convention. He continued by noting that the GSE itself had been inconsistent in its granting of travel permissions to foreign diplomats in Eritrea. He personally had been refused permission to travel to Senafe and Assab, whereas the French and German Ambassadors or their representatives had been allowed to travel to those locations. Noting that our response was strictly reciprocal, the Ambassador left little doubt that it would continue, but did assure Girma the GSE's concerns would be fully conveyed to Washington.

¶5. (C) As to Somalia, the Ambassador noted that the USG and GSE may not necessarily be in disagreement about the end goal, i.e. a united, prosperous Somalia. However, Washington has grave concerns about the addition of troops and weapons into Somalia which add a destabilizing factor. The Ambassador noted that he was fully aware of the GSE's assertions that it had not provided either to the Council of Islamic Courts. The USG, he said, believes otherwise. So long as the GSE actions continue, we will also continue to voice our concerns. The Ambassador said we would welcome an open policy dialogue but noted that the constant attacks in the GSE-owned media avowing the "sinister schemes" and "evil plots" of the USG in the region did not help encourage such engagement.

¶6. (SBU) While walking out of the meeting with Girma's Deputy Abraham Yohannes, the Ambassador inquired about the status of a diplomatic note sent to the MFA on November 20, requesting consular access to a U.S.-Eritrean dual national believed to have been detained earlier in the week in Dekemhare. The Ambassador requested that the MFA respond to the diplomatic note and grant the Embassy access to the individual. Yohannes said he would look into the matter. (Note: Post has followed several other cases this autumn concerning the detention of dual nationals. As described in previous cables, the GSE does not recognize the American citizenship of dual nationals and has not responded to any of post's

diplomatic notes nor granted access for visitation. Post has repeatedly and unsuccessfully requested access to visit the baby of an American father who has been in detention with his Eritrean mother for over two months. Reftel A. End Note.)

17. (C) Post Comment: It is not unusual for the MFA to summon the Ambassador when it is particularly exercised over public comments by USG officials. In that sense, we welcome the GSE protests as they suggest our reciprocal travel restrictions, as well as our public comments on Somalia, are at least resonating within the government. Although we believe the GSE has a high threshold for diplomatic "pain" and is unlikely to reconsider its policies, clearly there is pique that the USG is pushing back and, given our access to the international media stage, our widely-covered comments on Eritrea's role in Somalia are particularly irritating. Post was equally interested, however, in what was not raised by Girma during the meeting, i.e. the Embassy's November 20 diplomatic note informing the MFA that NIV operations would be suspended on December 4 until the GSE issues a visa to needed U.S. TDY consular help. Since the GSE refused to issue the visa for a WAE TDYer to provide U.S. coverage of the consular section in December, post is proceeding with our plan for temporarily closing NIV operations (Reftel B). Post hopes this action will prompt the issuance of a visa in Cairo for our second consular TDYer to provide coverage in January. However, post is bracing for the greater likelihood that visas for TDY support personnel and permissions for in-country travel will become even scarcer while GSE rhetoric continues to spew anti-American vitriol in the months ahead. End Comment.
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